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Hall of Famer

05.24.2011 | Athletics Mike Kelly didn't pay much attention at first to the box that arrived in the mail Monday, May 23, having just returned from a weekend trip to Williamsburg, Va., and an event earlier that evening in Piqua, Ohio, with other University of Dayton coaches.

After going through the local supermarket coupons and bills, the retired University of Dayton football coach opened the package. Inside were a football printed with his name and the words "National Football Foundation," and a letter explaining exactly why he had received that box.

"I think this is a big deal," Kelly said to his wife Jeanne, who told him he needed to call athletics director Tim Wabler immediately to tell him he had earned one of college football's most prestigious honors.

On Tuesday, the National Football Foundation announced Kelly is one of six players and coaches who will be enshrined this year in the College Football Hall of Fame.

The six are part of the divisional hall of fame class, which includes players and coaches from the NCAA Football Championship Subdivision (formerly I-AA), NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. The six members of the divisional class are part of the 22-man College Football Hall of Fame class that also includes 14 players and two coaches from the Football Bowl Subdivision.

Kelly will travel to South Bend, Ind., July 15-16 for an induction ceremony during the College Football Hall of Fame's annual enshrinement festival.

"Quite frankly, I'm still kind of in a daze over all these things," Kelly said Tuesday during a press conference at University of Dayton Arena. "It's happened so fast, I have to let it sink in so I can appreciate it."

Kelly is the winningest football coach in University history and ranks fourth among all college coaches with at least 25 seasons of head coaching experience, regardless of division. During his 27-year career at UD, Kelly had a .819 winning percentage, going 246-54-1.

Florida A&M's Jake Gaither (.844), Nebraska's Tom Osborne (.836) and Michigan's Fielding Yost (.828) are the only three coaches with 25-plus year tenures with higher winning percentages.

Under Kelly, the Flyers won a Division III national championship in 1989 and NCAA I-AA Mid-Major national championships in 2002 and 2007. Kelly was a seven-time national coach of the year and a six-time Pioneer Football League coach of the year.

"It's very special for me to see Mike get what he deserves," said current Flyers coach Rick Chamberlin, a former player and assistant coach. "Playing for Mike and then being able to be an assistant under Mike here has been a real pleasure for me and an opportunity as a young coach to grow under Mike's tutelage and his mentoring. It's the best thing that could ever happen to college football to give Mike this honor."

The other five members of the 2011 divisional class are Dexter Coakley (App. State, LB, 1993-96), Mike Favor (North Dakota State, C, 1985-88), Charles Haley (James Madison, LB, 1982-85), Mickey Kobrosky (Trinity (Conn.), B, 1933-36) and Bill Manlove (Coach, Widener, 1969-91; Delaware Valley, 1992-95; La Salle, 1997-2001).

Of the 4.79 million who have played college football, the newest class of inductees joins only 896 players and 192 coaches in the College Football Hall of Fame.

Kelly and his wife had been in Virginia for the wedding of a former player, and he shared the story to emphasize his belief that the relationships he'd built during his tenure at Dayton were ultimately the most important achievements of his career.

The winning — and now the Hall of Fame enshrinement — were just added benefits.

"It's all about the people and the place," Kelly said. "I was in the right place and had the chance to work with a lot of great people."

For more information, contact Doug Hauschild at 937-229-4390.